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ABSTRACT

Noting that one way to break boundaries that separate one person from another is to use the writing experience to identify and analyze values, this paper presents guidelines for defining values, discussing values, and teaching about values. Teaching and discussion aids are provided to enhance the examination of narratives and biographies, which include: "A Common Core of Values" developed for use in the public school of Baltimore County, Maryland; "Rokeach's Value List" (1973); a diagram of Key Questions for Discussing Values; Additional Questions for Discussing Values; a list of "Activities for Teaching About Values," and a Personal Identity/Social Identity chart. (Contains 18 references.) (NH)

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BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES: USING THE WRITING EXPERIENCE TO EXAMINE THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN PERSONAL AND "AMERICAN" DEMOCRATIC IDEALS IN THE SCHOOLROOM

PRESENTATION AT THE SPRING CONFERENCE
OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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Boundaries--created when differences in gender, ethnicity, language background, social class, or religion overshadow our similarities--often separate us from others. One way to break these boundaries is to use the writing experience to examine the conflicts between personal and "American" democratic ideals in the schoolroom. We can explore our personal identities by writing about significant life decisions. Identifying and analyzing the values in these narratives during dialogues with our peers can help us to break some of the boundaries that exist because of our differences.

Narratives about significant life decisions can be written in several rhetorical modes. These stories can be descriptions of important events, expositions about the reasons for making the decision, or essays about the feelings experienced during the events surrounding the decision. Regardless of the mode, our narratives will contain explicit or implicit statements about values that provide insights about our personal and social identities. We can compare our values with the "American" democratic ideals in the schoolroom and perhaps resolve conflicts when our values differ from those of others.

DEFINING VALUES

Before we examine the values found in our narratives about significant life decisions, we should explore the concept of values. Discussions of the meanings of the term "values," a term that lacks conceptual clarity because of its current use as a political slogan and buzzword, are beneficial.

According to Rokeach (1973), individuals possess a relatively small number of values. These values are organized into value systems. He argues that antecedents of values can be traced to culture, society and its institutions, and to personality. He also claims that the consequences of values are evident in social phenomena.

Values serve many functions. They are "the conceptual tools and weapons that we all employ in order to maintain and enhance self-esteem" (Rokeach, p. 14). Values are standards that guide and determine actions and attitudes. They serve "adjustive, ego-defensive, knowledge, and self-actualizing functions" (p. 25).

Values can be classified into four categories. These categories were developed for a qualitative analysis of values in literature textbooks and can be used to guide explorations of values during class discussions (Hamberger, 1990). These categories are:

1. **BELIEFS** that serve as guides for thoughts or actions
2. **PREFERENCES** for objects or specific paths of action
3. **OUTCOMES** that may be deemed rewards or punishments for particular paths of action
4. **JUDGEMENTS** that are expressed during conflicts with the self, others, or outside forces

Returning to our examination of values in the narratives about significant life decisions, we can search for values in our stories by looking for statements about our beliefs, preferences, outcomes, and judgements. In some instances, statements, such as "I believed," "I chose," or "I discovered," will signal explicit statements about values. In other cases, individuals we have to make inferences about the values embedded in our narratives.

In addition to exploring the definition of the broad concept of values, discussions of specific values can provide the language for identifying and analyzing the values in these narratives. Several lists of values can be used a starting points. One example of a list that can be used for class discussions was developed for use in the public schools of Baltimore County, Maryland.

A COMMON CORE OF VALUES

[from *1984 and Beyond: A Reaffirmation of Values*]

*COMPASSION
*COURTESY
*CRITICAL INQUIRY
[scientific method]
*DUE PROCESS
*EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY
*FREEDOM OF THOUGHT
AND ACTION
*HONESTY
*HUMAN WORTH AND DIGNITY
*INTEGRITY
*JUSTICE
*KNOWLEDGE
*LOYALTY
*OBJECTIVITY
*ORDER
*PATRIOTISM
*RATIONAL CONSENT
*REASONED ARGUMENT
*RESPECT FOR OTHERS' RIGHTS
*RESPONSIBILITY
*RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP
*RULE OF LAW
*SELF-RESPECT
*TOLERANCE
*TRUTH

A list of values developed by Rokeach (1973) has been used in extensive studies that have been conducted by this social scientist and his colleagues.

ROKEACH'S VALUE LIST (1973)

INSTRUMENTAL VALUES are beliefs about desirable modes of conduct.

MORAL VALUES are modes of behavior "that have an interpersonal focus, which when violated, arouse pangs of conscience or feelings of guilt for wrongdoing" (p. 8):

- BROAD-MINDED
- CHEERFUL
- FORGIVING
- HELPFUL
- HONEST
- INDEPENDENT
- LOVING
- OBEDIENT
- POLITE
- RESPONSIBLE

COMPETENCE VALUES have a personal rather than an interpersonal focus and their violation leads "to feelings of shame about personal inadequacy rather than to feelings of guilt about wrongdoing" (p. 8):

- AMBITIOUS
- CAPABLE
- COURAGEOUS
- CLEAN
- IMAGINATIVE
- INTELLECTUAL
- LOGICAL
- SELF-CONTROLLED

TERMINAL VALUES are beliefs about desirable end-states of existence.

SOCIAL VALUES are society-centered and interpersonal in focus (pp. 7-8):

- A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT
- A WORLD OF BEAUTY
- A WORLD OF PEACE
- EQUALITY
- FAMILY SECURITY
- NATIONAL SECURITY
- SOCIAL RECOGNITION
- TRUE FRIENDSHIP

PERSONAL VALUES are self-centered and intrapersonal in focus (pp. 7-8):

- A COMFORTABLE LIFE
- AN EXCITING LIFE
- FREEDOM
- HAPPINESS
- INNER HARMONY
- MATURE LOVE
- PLEASURE
- SALVATION
- SELF-RESPECT
- WISDOM

DISCUSSING VALUES

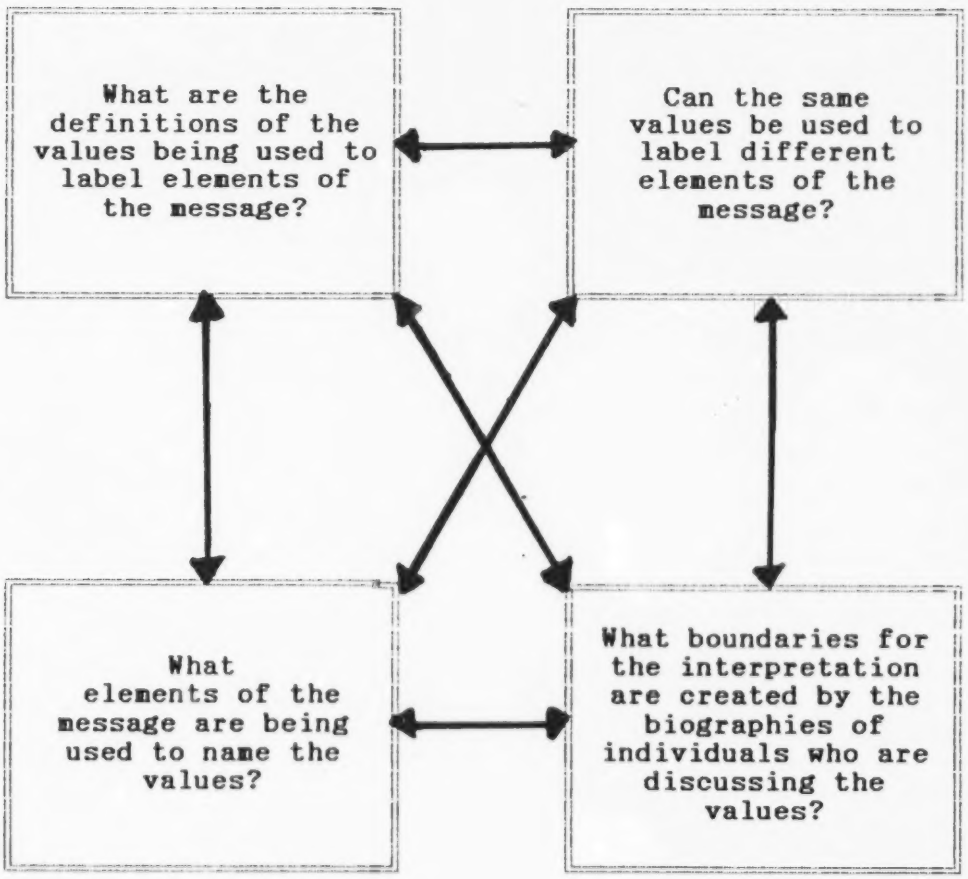
Providing the language for identifying and labelling the explicit and implicit values found in our narratives about significant life decisions can facilitate discussions of values. If values are considered to be objects and if we believe that a single, verifiable interpretation is possible, then agreement about the identification and the labelling of specific values is possible. In this case, discussions may involve locating elements in the text which contain value messages and agreeing on the meanings of these messages.

However, the process becomes more complex if values are not considered to be objects and if we do not believe that a single, verifiable interpretation can be established. Consequently, discussions may involve debates about labelling particular elements in the text as specific values or about the meanings of the value messages. This process will require us to make inferences, to draw conclusions, and to defend our interpretations.

Several questions can provide the framework for these discussions. Our graphic depiction of these questions is an attempt to visualize a process that is neither linear nor sequential. (See Key Questions for Discussing Values.) This web has been designed to emphasize that the questions can be asked in any order as we explore the meanings of value messages during discussions of our narratives. These four questions highlight points of possible agreement or disagreement about these messages. For example, we may agree or disagree about the definitions of specific values. Second, each of us can identify the specific elements of the message which were used to name the values. Third, we may label different elements of the message with the same value. Last, we can explore the boundaries for our interpretations which are created by our own biographies, including our backgrounds of experience and our prior knowledge.

To illustrate how these questions can be used, one of the presenters analyzed her narrative about a significant life decision--her decision to apply for a college teaching position during her sixteenth year of public school teaching. She noted that the outcome of the decision was being hired to teach in a college located several hours from her home. Sending a concise letter of application and a resume before the deadline are two elements in the text which she labelled with the value word <u>responsibility</u>. Her interest in teaching at the college level suggests that she values knowledge and the education process. Other individuals might label these elements of her narrative with different value words. A discussion of the interpretations could examine various definitions of specific value words, such as responsibility and knowledge. Other elements of the narrative could be labelled as examples of the presenter's responsibility, and other values might also be identified. The presenter could provide additional details about her values, life experiences, and prior knowledge to explore the boundaries which her biography creates for the interpretation of the narrative.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSING VALUES


What are the definitions of the values being used to label elements of the message?
Can the same values be used to label different elements of the message?
What elements of the message are being used to name the values?
What boundaries for the interpretation are created by the biographies of individuals who are discussing the values?

TEACHING ABOUT VALUES

Enriching our understanding of values can become an ongoing learning process in the schoolroom. Teachers can use questions for each level of the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy (1956) to guide students' thinking about one or more of the specific values that are being explored during a lesson. These questions can be used to explore values in selections written by students or those found in textbooks or tradebooks used in any subject area. Furthermore, the questions can serve as starting points for discussing values in media other than written texts.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSING VALUES

KNOWLEDGE--*identification and recall of information*
- Define the value.
- Identify statements about values found in a story.

COMPREHENSION--*organization and selection of facts and ideas*
- Explain in your own words what the value means.
- Explain what the value means to characters in a story.

APPLICATION--*use of facts, rules, or principles*
- Discuss an example of a person who shows the value in his/her actions.
- Explain how this value could be used in other situations.

ANALYSIS--*separation of a whole into component parts*
- What actions suggest that an individual holds the value?
- Classify/categorize beliefs or actions that reflect specific values.
- Compare/contrast the meanings of different values.

SYNTHESIS--*combination of ideas to form a new whole*
- What actions would you expect from a person who holds the value?
- What might happen if there is a conflict between two values?
- What problems could be solved by acting on a specific value?

EVALUATION--*development of opinions, judgements, or decisions*
- Why do you think the value is important?
- What is your opinion of a person's actions?
- Would it be better if a person changed his/her values?
- What are the most important values in your value system?

Activities that involve reading, writing, speaking, and listening can also be used to teach students about values. The brief descriptions of activities included on the following list are consistent with the whole language philosophy. Moreover, these ideas can be developed into cooperative learning activities and can provide students with opportunities to appreciate differences in gender, ethnicity, and language backgrounds, social class, and religion.

ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING ABOUT VALUES

Construct a word web to explore the meaning of a specific value. Students could include examples of incidents during which an individual demonstrated the value. They could list examples from a story that suggest that characters acted according to specific values.

Discuss the values that are being taught by the enforcement of various rules for the classroom, school, and community. Compare/contrast these values with those taught in the home.

Discuss the values that are conveyed in various proverbs or quotes. Use examples of proverbs or quotes from various cultures. Write about the meanings of these proverbs or quotes.

Discuss values found in literature. Compare/contrast values emphasized in literature from different cultures. Fables, legends, and fairy tales often contain explicit statements of values and can be used as starting points for value discussions. Discuss the value systems of individuals who are the subjects of autobiographies or biographies.

Have students develop value collages. Students use pictures or drawings to show what they value. Ask students to explain the values evident in their collages.

Emphasize the values that are being taught when cooperative learning activities are used. Discuss ways individuals can work together and ways to handle conflicts. Discuss messages about values that are conveyed through the actions of group members.

Use the writing process to explore values. Students can write journal entries about specific values. They can identify values found in their own writing or in writing done by their peers.

Discuss the values that are being taught when students participate in service projects. For example, explain that compassion and friendship are expressed during a canned food drive or emphasize that respect for living things and love of nature are being demonstrated during ecology projects.

Invite guest speakers to discuss their accomplishments and to explain how their value systems have influenced their lives.

VALUES AND OUR PERSONAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES

According to Bruner (1990), individuals express their understandings of their worlds in the narratives they tell. We can attempt to understand how a person defines himself/herself as a human (personal identity) and as a member of a culture (social identity) by examining the stories which the person tells. The language which we need to discuss these narratives is one that enables us to identify the values which a narrator possesses in his/her personal and social identities. These values are expressed in the beliefs, preferences, outcomes, or judgements that are stated or embedded in their stories.

According to Caughey (1980), Americans possess both personal and social identities. Our personal identity is similar to what psychologists would define as a personality. It includes the ways in which we define ourselves by gender, developmental stage, intelligence, or any number of other parameters of the human condition. Our social identity, by contrast, is expressed in the ways that we--and others--define our roles in the society. These roles include identities such as student or teacher, parent, citizen, or member of a profession.

Our personal identity, except in the special case of the mentally ill, is singular and unique to each individual. However, we usually have a number of social identities, and we share these identities with others. Our personal identity and each of our social identities exist along a continuum. At one end of this continuum is a definition of our identity which we fear might be true. For example, we might fear that our personal identity is basically evil, or a teacher might fear that in his/her role as manager of student behavior he/she is incompetent. At the opposite end of this spectrum is the identity which we attempt to show to others. In the personal identity, we will, in most cases, project an identity which is basically good, although the truth, the reality of our personal identity, probably lies somewhere between the feared evil and the projected saintliness. The same continuum exists for each of our social identities. (See the chart that summarizes these points.)

PERSONAL IDENTITY (similar to personality)

feared----believed----real----projected

male/female
child/adult
intelligent/unintelligent
honest/dishonest
caring/selfish

SOCIAL IDENTITY (cultural role)

feared----believed----real----projected

student
teacher
parent
citizen

SUMMARY

Each individual who assumes the social identity of a teacher in a schoolroom in America brings with him/her a personal identity. These identities can be described using the continuum which ranges from the feared to the projected identity. For example, the continuum for an individual who has assumed the cultural role of a teacher may extend from the feared identity of incompetence to the projected identity of complete competence and full command of the appropriate knowledge base. Thus, we can explore our values--whether these are stated or embedded in our narratives--as part of the ongoing process of examining our personal and social identities and of expressing our understandings of our worlds.

Certainly, one way to break the boundaries that separate us from others is examine our narratives. Comparing and contrasting the limits imposed by our own biographies with the narratives of others can expand our understanding. And, perhaps, these explorations of our values and of our identities can serve as starting points for resolving the conflicts between personal and "American" democratic ideals in the schoolroom.

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